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INFO RUEHZL/EUROPEAN POLITICAL COLLECTIVE PRIORITY  
RUCNDT/USMISSION USUN NEW YORK PRIORITY 1482  
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RUZEJAA/USNIC PRISTINA SR PRIORITY

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 PRISTINA 000258

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DEPT FOR EUR, EUR/SCE, NSC FOR BRAUN, USUN FOR DREW  
SCHUFLETOWSKI, USOSCE FOR STEVE STEGER

E.O. 12958: DECL: 05/23/2018

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SUBJECT: KOSOVO: ISG CONVENES IN PRISTINA FOR THE FIRST  
TIME

Classified By: CDA TINA KAIDANOW FOR REASONS 1.4 (B) AND (D)

11. (C) Summary: The International Steering Group for Kosovo, presided over by International Civilian Representative (ICR) Pieter Feith, met in Kosovo for the first time to express support for Kosovo's government in light of the impending coming-into-force of Kosovo's new constitution on June 15. Prime Minister Thaci opened the meeting with a short presentation stressing progress on Ahtisaari implementation and the importance of the upcoming transition centered around the new constitution. The ISG agreed to admit three new members; addressed the significance of the June 15 date and noted the need for greater clarity from the UN on its reconfiguration after that transition date; and underscored the urgency of securing new diplomatic recognitions for Kosovo, with the U.S. suggesting that a subgroup of the ISG be formed to assist the Kosovars in this process. The ISG agreed to meet again at local level in early June, and at Balkans director level sometime shortly after the June 15 transition timeframe. End Summary.

12. (C) Prime Minister Thaci opened the ISG meeting with a brief accounting of Kosovo's successes in the past few months, including passage of an Ahtisaari-compliant constitution, Assembly action on 24 Ahtisaari laws, and restraint in the face of Serbian provocations following independence. Thaci stressed the importance of the June 15 coming-into-force of Kosovo's constitution and said that, with all due respect for the UN and its accomplishments in Kosovo, an acknowledgment from the UN of Kosovo's new authorities would need to come shortly. Feith followed with his own review of political events in Kosovo since the last ISG meeting in April, pointing out that Serbian municipal elections had been held in Kosovo on May 11 despite UNMIK's declaring them illegitimate; no problems ensued on the day of elections, but the challenge still remained of dealing with the impact of those elections and ongoing attempts by Belgrade to form parallel structures in Kosovo. There was some discussion of coalition-forming in Belgrade as it impacted on events in Kosovo, with common feeling that a DS-led government would be far preferable to one led by the Radicals, but that any government coalition would persist in efforts to separate the two ethnic communities. Feith observed that since the February 17 declaration of independence, Serbian actions had already led to a walk-back of the institutional integration that had obtained in police,

customs, etc. before that date, and noted the continuing risk that these provocations could antagonize the ethnic Albanian community.

13. (C) The ISG agreed to admit another three members (Croatia, Lithuania and Norway), and discussed as a matter of urgency the need to gain new recognitions for Kosovo prior to the September UNGA session in which Belgrade could be expected to challenge Kosovo and its supporters with renewed vigor. Deputy Assistant Secretary Rosemary DiCarlo, representing the U.S., suggested that the ICO shepherd a subgroup of countries willing to lend their diplomatic resources to encouraging further recognitions for Kosovo. She also emphasized that countries needed to find ways to make Kosovo feel empowered as a state, whether through concluding bilateral agreements or other appropriate means, including visits and consultations.

14. (C) Feith recounted the progress made on Ahtisaari implementation since the last ISG meeting, with another five laws passed by the Kosovo Assembly, another legislative package in the making, and efforts on the part of the Kosovo government to pursue decentralization via formation of an inter-ministerial working group in tandem with the International Civilian Office. The upcoming Donors Conference was discussed, with the EC advising that they would need to see a completed Medium Term Expenditure Framework (MTEF) from the Kosovo Finance Ministry very soon in order to carry forward with the conference credibly.

15. (C) Transition questions also occupied the minds of the

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ISG members, with general concurrence that greater clarity was needed from the UN on the nature of its reconfiguration post-June 15. ISG members supported the closure of UNMIK's Pillar IV (its EU-funded economic pillar), which the EU had notified UNMIK it would be unwilling to support after June 30, and the transfer of those responsibilities with appropriate safeguards to the Kosovo government. There was further discussion of the ICO budget and activities, with agreement to have the ISG meet again at local level in early June and shortly after the June 15 transition date at Balkan directors level in Pristina. The ISG issued a statement on its conclusions (e-mailed to EUR/SCE).

KAIDANOW